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POOR AND GOOD LEARNERS' LANGUAGE BELIEFS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THEIR LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY USE

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Abstract: This study focuses on exploring poor and good learners' language beliefs and their language strategy use in an attempt to see whether there is any significant relationship between the poor and good learners. This paper particularly seeks to examine to what extent language beliefs as a construct are reflected in learners' language behavior, which consequently may provide some pedagogical implications for teachers to benefit in classroom applications. A total of 146 undergraduate subjects were involved in this descriptive study, 86 of whom were classified as "poor" and 60 as "good" Turkish adult learners of English as a foreign language in an intensive language program at undergraduate level. The data were obtained through using two questionnaires, the results of which were analyzed through SPSS version 15. The results demonstrate that good language learners significantly differed from poor learners in certain beliefs including perceptions about pronunciation, possessing special abilities and the nature of language learning. The findings indicate a possible relationship and correlation between learner beliefs and strategy use.

Keywords: Language learning strategies; language beliefs; poor-good learners

Özet: Bu çalışma, zayıf ve iyi öğrenciler arasında kayda değer bir ilişki olup olmadığını saptamak amacıyla, zayıf ve iyi öğrencilerin dil inançlarını ve onların dil stratejisi kullanımlarını keşfetmeye odaklanmaktadır. Bu çalışma özellikle bir kurgu olarak dil inançlarının ne derecede öğrencilerin dil davranışlarına yansıdığını incelemektedir ki bu sonuç olarak öğretmenlere sınıflarında yararlanabilecekleri bazı eğitimsel öneriler sunabilir. Bu betimleyici çalışmaya lisans düzeyinde yoğun bir dil programında İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen toplamda 146 yetişkin Türk lisans öğrencisi katılmıştır ki bunların 86'sı "zayıf" olarak ve 60'ı ise "iyi" olarak sınıflandırılmaktadır. İki anket kullanılarak veri toplanmıştır ve sonuçlar SPSS 15 kullanılarak incelenmiştir. Sonuçlar göstermektedir ki iyi dil öğrencileri zayıf öğrencilerden sesletim, özel yeteneklere sahip olma ve dil öğreniminin doğası gibi algıları da içeren belirli inançlarda anlamlı derecede farklılık göstermiştir. Bu bulgular öğrenci inançları ile strateji kullanımı arasında muhtemel bir ilişkinin ve korelasyonun olduğuna işaret etmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Dil öğrenme stratejileri; dil inançları; zayıf-iyi öğrenciler

Introduction

Foreign language learners develop many beliefs, assumptions and preconceived ideas about language learning on the basis of their own experiences and what they have been exposed to in formal and informal teaching/learning environments (Ellis, 1995; Horwitz, 1987; Wenden, 1987). Considering that students have accumulated a great deal of experience over the course of their education up to university, they are most likely to form certain beliefs about what constitutes effective or ineffective learning. Beliefs have much in common with concepts such as dispositions, implicit theories, preconceptions, attitudes, values, opinions, judgments, perspectives and even personal theories. In support of this, according to Richards and Lockhart (1995), "learners, too, bring to their learning their own beliefs, goals, attitudes and decisions, which in turn influence how they approach their learning" (p. 52). Furthermore, beliefs can be of vital importance in teaching-learning processes as beliefs are inevitably intertwined with one's knowledge in general. Knowledge is not thought of as the representation of a world or a "real thing", independent of the knower. It is a process between

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the knower and known. People have an active part in the process of constructing knowledge. Cognitive humans actively select and interpret information in a given environment. They do not passively absorb information to construct a storehouse of knowledge (Kayaoğlu, 2011a). Therefore, knowledge is subjective in the sense that it is shaped through experience. Individuals bring their own experiences and senses to actions and events. Williams and Burden (1997) point out that language learners also get actively involved in making their own sense in relation to language learning by attending to new information, constructing and reconstructing meaning and relating new information to the existing knowledge. In their endeavors to learn a foreign language, learners try to make sense of their world and construct their own beliefs on the basis of their own experience. Thus, all kinds of experience are unique, in the sense that they are personal, and essentially subjective.

Research to date provides considerable theoretical and empirical evidence that students' conceptions of learning and their approaches to learning influence the quality of the learning outcome (Altan, 2006; Berry & Sahlberg, 1996; Kayaoğlu, 2011b; Peacock, 2001). Furthermore, many second language learning models assign an important role to learner beliefs (Bialystok, 1978; Naiman, Frohlich, Stern & Tudesco, 1978), either as a pre-existing factor, or in the case of Bialystok's model, as an interactive complimentary component. Bialystok (1978), for example, developed a model of second language learning in an attempt to account for discrepancies both in individual achievement and achievement in different aspects of second language learning. In her model, she assigns a unique role to learners' beliefs and knowledge that the learner brings to the language learning.

While various researchers have been interested in the cognitive and other strategies that language learners bring to their learning as one of the factors to be taken into account in an explanation of how foreign languages are learned, the relation between student beliefs about language learning and their strategy choice and use has received little attention. As Wenden (1987) suggests, "there is almost no mention in the literature of second language learners' reflections on the assumptions or beliefs underlying their choice of strategies" (p. 103). The similar weakness is also stressed by Horwitz (1987) by highlighting the relationship between the beliefs that students hold, and their language learning strategies. Beliefs about language learning may have an effect or in fact may interfere with the learners' strategy use and choice. These beliefs that guide their language actions may reside at the tacit level. For example, a student who believes that language learning is mostly a matter of learning grammar rules may be predicted to expend most of his/her time and energy on syntax, while another student who believes that a foreign language is learned in the country where it is spoken may underestimate his/her own capacity and resources to utilize in a non-native speaking environment and hence start language learning with a fairly negative expectation of his/her learning outcome.

Most of the research on learners in the seventies and in part eighties (Chamot, 1987; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975) focused on what it was that "good" language learners actually do unlike what the poor learners do when they try to learn a second or a foreign language. This interest was stimulated particularly by the assumption that some students are more successful than others in learning a foreign language under the same environment, and "good learners" differ to some extent in certain sets of behaviors which they employ to enable them to be more successful. So success can partly be explained by discovering what "good" learners do that the "poor" learners do not do by looking at what is going on inside the good language learner, by considering how he is successful, what strategies, what cognitive processes he uses to

learn a language, we may be led to well-developed theories of the processing of linguistic information which can be taught to others (Rubin, 1975, p. 49).

On the basis of this approach, Rubin (1975), Stern (1978) and Naiman et al. (1978) initially attempted to identify characteristics of the good language learner and came up with an inventory. Good language learners are characterized by (a) making inferences (using existing clues at a number of levels such as lexicology, grammar, discourse, and world knowledge), (b) using sources and strategies including gestures, paraphrasing, and accommodation skills and so on to communicate their messages without hesitation, (c) making use of cognitive skills such as analyzing, categorizing, and synthesizing, (d) taking practicing opportunities such as meeting people and joining social activities, which would enable them to use the target language in an authentic communicative context, (e) observing people who use the target language well to enrich their language and make necessary changes in their approaches and study skills, (f) taking responsibility for their own learning and tailor their learning conditions, (g) challenging the complexities of the target language, (h) associating new items with the learned ones and (i) being keen on analyzing, categorizing, synthesizing the information s/he encounters in order to classify it and grasp patterns in the language.

While it is recognized that the good language learner differs in his/her approach, study habits, preference, persistence and language behavior from the poor learner (Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975), little attention is paid to the relationship between process and product in the dichotomy of the good and poor learner. Language beliefs, among other factors, may shed light on the reasons why the poor and the good learners differ from each other in certain behaviors.

Language Learning Strategies

The notion of language learning strategies has come to be widely recognized as a fundamental element in several models of language learning (Oxford, 1990; Weinstein & Mayer, 1986) in particular with the emergence of cognitive psychology. The growing awareness of the behaviors which learners use while learning a foreign language has been one of the most important outcomes of the movement towards a learner-centered approach to language learning in recent years (Ellis, 1995; Mayer, 1988; Skehan, 1991). Within this approach, learners are seen to be actively involved in the process of learning by selectively attending to incoming data, hypothesizing, comparing, contrasting, elaborating, and reconstructing meaning and integrating it with previously learned information (Anderson, 1985). Therefore, much attention has been devoted to identifying mental processes including perception, memory, learning, retention, inference, and testing. A similarity between the way individuals and computers process information has been made.

Learning strategies are largely considered to be goal-oriented specific behaviors and mental operations that the learner employs consciously or unconsciously to facilitate learning and to ease the acquisition, storage, retrieval and use of information. Various attempts have been made to produce different inventories of learning strategies (Bialystok, 1985; Chamot, 1987; Chamot & O'Malley, 1987; Cohen & Macaro, 2010; Davies, 1995; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1987; Weinstein & Mayer, 1986). Oxford (1990), building on the earlier classification schemes, provides us with the most comprehensive and detailed classification of learning strategies, which, is, therefore, employed for this study. This classification includes detailed suggestions for strategy use in each of the four language skills. Oxford divides language learning strategies into two major categories as direct and indirect. While direct strategies are further subdivided into the three subgroups such as memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies, indirect strategies involve metacognitive, affective and social strategies.

Since learning strategies are defined in general as behaviors that are intended to influence how the individual processes information, learning strategies are placed within the underlying theories of human learning (Mayer, 1988). For instance, Anderson's (1985) model of language learning explains the role of strategies by referring to the information processing framework resting on the distinction between two different types of knowledge stored in memory: *declarative knowledge* (factual information about the second language that has not been integrated or automatized), and *procedural knowledge* (what we know how to do). Declarative knowledge refers to the type of information maintained in long-term memory as a network of propositional meaning-based concepts. The meaning of information is maintained through propositional representations which are represented as nodes (ideas) connected to arguments and other nodes via associations. These nodes, organized into hierarchies, are led to larger units of meaning which can be activated and linked or related to other features within schemata. Procedural knowledge is, on the other hand, characterized and represented in memory by production systems, which are used as the basis for explaining how cognitive skills are acquired and language is learned, highlighting the role of learning strategies. Ellis's (1995) characteristics of the term "strategies" are as follows:

- Strategies are general approaches as well as specific actions or techniques employed to learn an L2
- Strategies are problem-orientated
- In the main, strategies contribute indirectly to learning by providing learners with data about the L2 which they can then process. However, some strategies may also contribute directly
- Learners are aware of the strategies they use in their effort to learn a foreign language
- Strategies involve linguistic and non-linguistic behavior
- While some strategies are behavioral, others are mental. Thus some strategies are directly observable, while others are not
- Strategy use varies considerably depending on the task the learners is engaged in and individual learner preferences

There has been a growing research interest in language learning strategies, including more variables to examine the relationship between language learning strategies and the possible factors. For example, Alhaisoni (2012) used SILL with 701 Saudi EFL undergraduates to examine the relationship between type and frequency of language learning strategies and gender and proficiency level. The results showed that cognitive and metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used and affective strategies and memory strategies were the least frequently used. The results also showed that there was no significant gender difference in strategy use except for social strategies. Females were found to use social_strategies significantly more often than males. Females also used strategies in general much more frequently than the males. Furthermore, the findings showed that highly proficient students used all strategies more than low-proficiency students. Demirel (2012) also used SILL to determine the language learning strategies used by 702 university students. It was seen that females used language learning strategies more often and there was a correlation between the use of language strategies and level of proficiency. Yıldızlar (2012) in a study with 78 prospective teachers indicated a significant difference between female and male participants in terms of "attention strategies" in that the females used them much more frequently than the males. Teh, Embi, Yusoff and Mahamod's (2009) study which was conducted with 457 students in Malaysia, also supports the general conclusions that female learners use language

learning strategies more often than men. Unlike the studies favoring the female in the use of language learning strategies, Tercanlıoğlu (2004) reported that males used significantly greater strategies than females in a Turkish setting.

Ku and Chang (2011) focused on four dimensions of learning strategies (attitude, motivation, anxiety, and information processing) in an attempt to investigate the effect of academic discipline and gender difference on Taiwanese college students' learning styles and strategies in web-based learning environments. It was found that while information processing was the highest, anxiety was the lowest. In addition, sequential learners were found to be much more motivated than moderate and sensing learners. Also, females had higher levels of motivation than the male participants.

Chen and Hung (2012) conducted a survey with 364 senior high school (English as a Foreign Language) students in Taiwan to examine the role of personality on perceptual style preferences and learning strategies through the use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and SILL. The results indicated that extroverted students used compensation, metacognitive, cognitive, memory, affective, and social strategies more frequently than introverted students. They also found that students with an intuitive personality type used memory and compensation strategies more frequently than students who had a sensing personality.

In a strategy- styles related survey study by Küçük (2012) with 1039 English-majoring students following online courses, it was found that learning styles were found not to affect learning strategies. Yıldırım and Akcayürek (2013) in a quasi-experimental study found that strategy-based English language instructions had a positive impact on the language proficiency of students. In a specific language skill-based study, Odacı (2006) focused on the effect of an explicit listening comprehension strategy training on listening comprehension strategy use and listening proficiency levels. The strategies taught were inferencing, prediction, reconstruction, comprehension monitoring, comprehension evaluation, asking for clarification, elaboration, listening to your body, translation, note-taking, metacognitive directed attention, real-time assessment and planning for learning. The participants in the experimental group were found to use strategies much more frequently thanks to the training undertaken and they showed significantly higher levels of listening proficiency at the TOEFL exam at the end of the study. Likewise, Kayaoğlu and Özbay (2009) carried out a study with 17 EFL students to find out the role of explicit strategy instruction on the use of listening comprehension strategies of high and low ability intermediate level EFL students. The pre-test and post-test results showed that high ability listeners frequently tended to use cognitive and meta-cognitive tactics, and prior knowledge, linguistic knowledge and contextual information. However, low ability listeners used mostly translation, repetition, note taking, key word and only low-level comprehension monitoring strategies.

Ünal, Onursal-Ayırır and Arıoğul (2011) worked with 343 volunteer preparation class students to find out if there was any significant statistical difference between those learning English, German and French in terms of using strategies. It was found that the highest strategy use ratio belongs to French, and the lowest to English. Except for compensation strategies, all strategy uses in three languages differed statistically. In a cross-cultural context Altan (2006) used the SILL to examine the nationality factor in language learning strategy preferences, involving students from Hungary, China and Turkey. No statistically significant differences were reported in the overall SILL results. However, there were significant differences in two strategy groups "memory strategies" and "affective strategies" between the groups of Chinese, Hungarian and Turkish students. Chinese participants were found to

employ the following individual strategies more frequently than Hungarian subjects: (1) the use of rhymes to remember new English words, (2) the use of flashcards to remember new English words, (3) physically acting out new English words, (4) reviewing English lessons, (5) looking for similar words in both languages, (6) making summaries of what they hear or read in English, (7) guessing what the other person will say next, (8) using language learning diaries, (9) talking to someone else about their feelings when they learn English. Chinese participants, in comparison with the Turkish learners were reported to use the following individual strategies more frequently: (1) the use of rhymes to remember new English words, (2) the use of flashcards to remember new English words, (3) physically acting out new English words, (4) reviewing English lessons, (5) making summaries of what they hear or read in English, (6) the use of gestures when they cannot think of a word during a conversation, (7) planning time to study English, (8) the use of language learning diaries, and (9) having (native) English speakers correct them when they talk.

In spite of the apparent variation in the nature of language learning strategies, and different focuses in other studies (Alpaslan, 2002; Cesur & Fer, 2007; Durgun, 2010; Nakatani, 2005; Özbilgin, 1993; Sezer, 1992; Zare 2010; Pei-Shi, 2012), an important implication is that strategies are largely under the control of the learner, goal oriented and empirically identifiable. Therefore, it is of great importance not only to identify the strategy uses of learners but also to investigate the influence of certain factors on language strategy use such as learners' beliefs. This is what this paper intends to do.

Method

This is a follow-up quantitative research investigation to find out the relationship between the poor and good learners' beliefs about language learning and their language learning strategy use. The study intends to address the following questions:

1. To what extent are language beliefs as a construct reflected in learners' language behavior?
2. What kind of beliefs do poor and good adult language learners hold about different aspects of foreign language and language learning?
3. What differences are there in the beliefs held by poor and good learners about different aspects of foreign language and language learning?
4. Is there any difference between poor and good learners in terms of strategy use?

The survey was selected due to its capacity for generating quantifiable data with the intention of exploring learners' beliefs about language learning and its relationship with strategy use. As Bryman (1995) indicates that "the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research is a technical matter whereby the choice between them is to do with their suitability" (p. 108), the choice of quantitative research tradition was suitable in answering the research questions which involved the use of structured items where the two groups (poor and good) were involved. As survey designs "are often called correlational designs to denote the tendency for such research to be able to reveal relationship between variables" (Bryman & Crammer 1994, p.14), this study also sought to establish the relationship between language beliefs and language learning strategy use, which is basically addressed with a survey, a precise measurement for identifying the differences or associations and the most characteristic form of quantitative research methods (Baker, 1994). In the present study, inferential statistics and non-parametric tests were used to make comparisons of groups and draw inferences from the sample.

To this end, the two questionnaires, Beliefs About Language Learning (BALLI) and Strategy Inventory For Language Learning (SILL), were used. The BALLI questionnaire, which was originally developed by Horwitz (1987), was modified according to our specified sample, context and setting so as to produce the data that the present study required. The SILL questionnaire was developed by Oxford (1990) from a comprehensive taxonomy of language learning strategies that systematically covers the use of four language skills in formal and informal situations. The SILL questionnaire is asserted to have a high degree of structure, allowing the researcher to determine not only the type of strategy but also the type of task and setting where the strategy is used. The SILL questionnaire has been extensively field-tested with a large number of university students in various settings for internal consistency, reliability and content validity of the items. For example, it is reported that with the SILL questionnaire, croncbah alphas were: .94 with a sample of 590 Taiwanese learners (Chinese translation), .92 with Japanese; .91 with the Puerto Ricon Spanish learners, and .93 with Korean learners (Oxford & Burry-Stock 1995). Using the Turkish translation with 476 Turkish adult learners, the internal reliability of the items calculated with SPSS exhibited a very high level of reliability (Reliability Coefficient: N of Case=476.0, N of Items=64, ALPHA= .9271) (Kayaoğlu, 1997). The Turkish versions of the questionnaires, which were already piloted and modified for the Turkish EFL context in previous studies (Kayaoğlu 1997, 2011a), were used in this study as well. The internal reliability of the items in the BALLI and SILL questionnaires again calculated with SPSS exhibited a very high level of reliability (Reliability (Reliability Coefficients alpha= .8281, and .8757 successively).

It is noteworthy to mention a study by Cesur and Fer (2007) on the validity and reliability of the Turkish version of Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL). The inventory was administered to a total of 768 students who were enrolled English Prep Classes in seven different universities such as Yıldız Technical University, İstanbul Technical University, Boğaziçi University, Maltepe University, Bahceşehir University, İstanbul Bilgi University, and Sabancı University, in Istanbul, Turkey. There were significant correlations (at the .00 and .01 level) among the 6 subscales. It was also reported that the results of factor analysis for construct validity of the inventory covered six dimensional constructs. “The total internal reliability of scale was .92 reliability coefficients. Findings demonstrated that the subscales had internal consistency reliabilities, item total correlation, ranging from .27 to .62. Test re-test reliability for external reliability of subscales was between .67-.82” (Cesur & Fer 2007, p. 49).

The results were analyzed on the basis of the classifications made by Horwitz (1987) and Oxford (1990). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data obtained from the BALLI questionnaire. To this end, percentages and mean ranks were found the most appropriate to present the main features of the quantitative data in a manageable form. Since the data obtained from the SILL questionnaire were ordinal, a non-parametric test, the Mann-Whitney U-Test was used in order to answer whether there were any significant differences between the poor and good learners in language learning strategy use. The Spearman rank correlation coefficient was employed to examine whether there was any correlation between learners’ language beliefs and strategy use. The Mann-Whitney U test represents a powerful tool for unrelated samples when the differences between two independent groups are to be assessed (Bryman & Cramer, 1995; Popham & Sitotnik, 1992).

Sample and Setting

A total of 146 subjects were involved in this study, 86 of whom were classified as “poor” and 60 as “good” from a total of 1885 university students attending an intensive language

program at a university in 2009-2010 in Turkey. This program offers a one-year language course as a university requirement to newly admitted students. All of the participants in the study were placed in beginning classes following a placement test. When the data was collected, they had been in the language program for 5 months. In order to categorize students as "good" and "poor" learners, 42 language instructors in the program were asked to identify successful and unsuccessful students in their classes on the basis of certain criteria: classroom observation, student participation and performance, progress and students' assignments. In spite of the apparent subjectivity in this initial categorization, the author of this paper was encouraged to start in this way by the idea that the teachers were in the best position to make judgments about their students' relative success as they had been observing their students and doing ongoing planned and unplanned evaluation and assessment at different intervals for five months. Another encouraging point was that each classroom had at least three or more English teachers to identify the most successful and unsuccessful students in each class, allowing the researcher to do cross checking with the lists of students evaluated independently by instructors. These lists were later checked and confirmed with the students' monthly and term exam results. The teachers were in particular, asked to classify students on the basis of whether they could be considered at the top or bottom, leaving out those who might come between.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1
Beliefs about Learning and Communication

		Percentage		
		Agree	Disagree	No Idea
It is important to speak English with excellent pronunciation	Poor	88.4	9.3	2.3
	Good	16.7	80	3.3
You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly	Poor	60.4	32.6	7
	Good	16.7	66.7	16.7
If you are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning, it will be hard to get rid of them later	Poor	60.5	25.6	14
	Good	30	61.6	8.3
It is good to guess if you do not know a word in English	Poor	25.6	67.4	7
	Good	88.4	5	6.7
It is useful to practice English with other students or people learning English	Poor	58.1	23.3	18.6
	Good	56.6	11.7	23.3
It is important to watch English TV or listening audios	Poor	40.5	57.2	2.4
	Good	91.7	5	3.3
Students should not be allowed to speak Turkish in English class	Poor	41.9	48.9	9.3
	Good	70	16.6	13.3
It is important to make a lot of practice	Poor	93	2.3	2.3
	Good	98.3	1.7	

Poor (N)= 86, Good (N)= 60

Poor learners vary enormously from the good learners in the extent to which they attached importance to communication strategies. The most apparent difference came out about the views in relation to pronunciation. Poor learners have very strong feeling about speaking English with excellent pronunciation (88.4 % agreement) whereas good learners appear to ignore the role of excellent pronunciation in speaking (only 16.7 % agreements). A very similar tendency was observed for the importance of accuracy. While a great majority of poor learners (60%) believe that one shouldn't say anything in English until one can say it correctly, only 17.7 percent of good learners agree with this idea. Poor learners justified their

strong emphasis on accuracy with the belief that they (60.5%) strongly hold that "If you are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning, it will be hard to get rid of them later." Guessing as an important language strategy receives a very low response from poor learners (25.6% agreement) whereas good learners overwhelmingly (88.4%) are in favor of guessing if the word is not known. While both groups agree about the benefit of practicing English with other students, good learners (91.7%) significantly differ from the poor learners (40.5%) about watching English TV or listening videos. As to the use of their mother tongue in English language classes, while poor learners differ within their group, most of the good learners (70%) are against the use of Turkish in English class. Apart from beliefs about language learning and communication, students' perceptions in relation to the ability-related factors are equally important and presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2
Perception of Ability, Good Ear and Memory in Language Learning

		Percentage		
		Agree	Disagree	No Idea
Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages	Poor	79.1	14	7
	Good	90	8.3	1.7
One should have a good ear in order to learn a language well	Poor	83.3	4.8	11.9
	Good	88.3	3.4	8.3
One should have a good memory in order to learn a language well	Poor	88.4	11.6	
	Good	88.3	6.7	5

Poor (N)= 86, Good (N)= 60

It is interesting to observe that both poor and good learners, as Table 2 reveals, overwhelmingly believe in the importance of possessing a special ability, a good ear and memory for language learning. Both poor and good learners strongly believe that some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages (79.1 % and 90 % respectively). The same tendency was also observed for having good memory and good ear about which more than 80 % of both poor and good learners have a very positive feeling. Once students revealed their perceptions about the role of special abilities, as presented in Table 2 above, the next step was to explore whether the students felt they possessed these abilities, which was discussed in Table 3 below.

Table 3
Perception of Possessing Ability, Good Ear and Memory in Language Learning

		Percentage		
		Agree	Disagree	No Idea
I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	Poor	18.6	67.4	14
	Good	63.3	16.7	5
I believe that I have a good memory for languages	Poor	11.6	60.5	27.9
	Good	75	13.3	11.7
I believe that I have a good ear for languages	Poor	16.7	54.7	28.6
	Good	65	25	10

Poor (N)= 86, Good (N)= 60

The findings with regard to learners' beliefs about having a special ability, a good ear and memory indicate a strong difference between the poor and good learners in their perceptions. While both groups were found to place equal importance to the role of certain abilities as outlined in Table 2, Table 3 suggests that very few poor learners (18.6%) have a positive feeling about possessing these abilities, underestimating their ability for language learning. Although it is not very feasible to measure their gift for language learning, this view of

perception, if preoccupied deep in their mind, is likely to guide their actions in language learning. The learners' subjective knowledge involves not only a cognitive and an affective but also a behavioral dimension. Looking from a behavioral perspective, learners who attribute success in language learning to possessing special abilities are not expected to take risks which might be beneficial; they also might avoid certain strategies and actions necessary for effective language learning.

Table 4
Beliefs about Nature of Language Learning

			Percentage		
		Agree	Disagree	No Idea	
It is necessary to know about English cultures in order to speak English	Poor	20.9	53.5	25.6	
	Good	71.6	15	13.4	
It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country	Poor	86	9.4	4.7	
	Good	15	81.7	3.3	
Learning a foreign lang. is mostly a matter of learning vocabulary	Poor	11.9	80.9	7.1	
	Good	78.3	20	1.7	
Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning grammar rules	Poor	53.5	32.6	14	
	Good	35	63.3	1.7	
Learning a foreign language is different from learning other academic subjects	Poor	81.4	4.6	14	
	Good	73.3	6.7	20	
The most important part of learning English is learning how to translate	Poor	81.4	23.2	32.6	
	Good	30	51.7	18.3	
No matter how hard some people study English, they cannot learn it very well	Poor	51.1	16.3	32.6	
	Good	38.3	43.3	18.3	

Poor (N)= 86, Good (N)= 60

With respect to beliefs about the nature of language learning, a great majority of good learners (71.6%) agreed with the statement: "it is necessary to know about the cultures in order to speak English". However, only 20.9 percent of poor learners were found to have a positive feeling about the value of target language culture(s) for communication. It is quite meaningful to observe that good learners significantly differed from the poor learners in the extent to which they attached importance to the ESL environment. While poor learners overwhelmingly (86%) held the view that it is best to learn English in an English-speaking country, most of the good learners (81.7) did not support this idea. This significant difference may be explained by Weiner's (1976) attribution theory in which all causes for success or failure can be categorized within the dimensions of locus, stability and controllability, affecting expectancy and value. For example, because of the external locus, which is very much related to the feelings of self-esteem, poor learners may use external attribution for their failure, attributing causes to an EFL environment where English is not used as a means of communication and therefore cannot be learned. When causality is assigned to an outside factor, one's behavior is more likely to be limited or completely determined by influences outside one's control. Good learners may be said, on the basis of limited data, to attribute achievement to an internal and unstable factor over which they can exercise a great deal of control. Therefore, they do not see an English-speaking environment as a must for learning English. The role of vocabulary received very different responses from both groups. Similarly, both poor and good learners shared the view that learning a foreign language is different from learning other academic subjects. Nevertheless, in terms of the role of translation and grammar, both groups represent two different poles in that most of the poor learners tended to associate learning a foreign language with learning grammar and translation (53.5% and 81.4% respectively). Perhaps one of the most astounding results was that more than half of the poor learners (51.1%) believed that some people cannot learn a foreign

language regardless of their effort. This becomes more important when considered together with the responses given by the poor learners to the ability related factors and persistence and effort as well as persistence and effort.

In relation to possessing special language abilities, although these beliefs may represent stereotypical impressions, they nevertheless can influence the degree to which learners think they can learn. These beliefs can sometimes lead to students undervaluing some language learning strategies which might be useful.

Analysis of Language Learning Strategies

The Mann-Whitney U-Test was chosen as an appropriate technique to assess if there was any significant difference between poor and good learners in the use of six major strategy groups. A five-point scale was used in rank order ranging from "always" to "never" in relation to language learning strategies. It is, however, important to remember that since the scales for the items of the questionnaire were coded and ranked from the lowest number (1) to the highest (5), the smaller mean is the higher rank. The strategies used by good and poor learners were analyzed in line with Oxford's (1990) taxonomy including memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, social and affective strategies as presented below. The Spearman correlation coefficient was utilized in order to examine the correlation between language beliefs and language strategy use by the poor and good learners.

Table 5
Memory Strategies

	Good	Poor	
	Mean Rank		2-tailed
Associating / Elaborating	57.27	83.79	Z=-4.224, P< .000
Using Sounds	67.30	81.31	Z=-2.051, P< .040
Using Imagery	59.68	82.14	Z=-3.307, P< .001
Representing Sounds in Memory	63.02	79.85	Z=-2.453, P< .014
Using mechanical technique	62.12	80.47	Z=-2.214, P<. 008
Structured reviewing	56.25	84.49	Z=-4.138, P< .000

Mann-Whitney U-Test

Good learners were observed to differ significantly from the poor learners in the use of associating/elaborating and using imagery through remembering location. Given the fact that associations are powerful aids for recall and comprehension, as well as making the material easier to remember, this strategy is assumed to activate schemata towards concepts in context. Practically, learners who create mental images can enhance memory for concepts and consequently become more effective learners if they increase the number of related ideas in language learning. The using imagery strategy (remembering a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used) was again significantly more frequently employed by the good learners. This specific strategy has special value in particular for reading and remembering words. Similarly, good learners, as Table 5 suggests, showed significantly more use of rhymes to remember new English words (Representing Sounds in Memory).

Table 6
Cognitive Strategies

	Good	Poor	
	Mean Rank		2-tailed
Repeating	62.02	80.53	Z=-2.731, P< .006
Formally Practicing with Sounds and writing systems	61.58	80.84	Z=-2.786, P< .005
Recombining	50.29.	88.58	Z=-5.665, P< .000
Practicing Naturalistically	55.49	85.01	Z=-4.301, P< .000
Using Formulas and Patterns	51.27	98.91	Z=-4.381, P< .000
Taking notes (in Turkish)	81.88	66.91	Z=-2.164, P< .031
Getting the Idea Quickly	58.66	82.84	Z=--3.504, P<.000
Reasoning Deductively	55.10	85.28	Z=-4.381, P< .000
Analyzing Expression	55.83	85.83	Z=-4.437, P< .000
Translating	92.64	59.52	Z=-4.842, P< .000

Mann-Whitney U-Test

The good learners revealed statistically significant differences from the poor learners in the use of a substantial number of cognitive strategies such as repeating, formally practicing with sounds and writing systems, recombining, practicing naturalistically, using formulas and patterns, deductive reasoning. While they showed greater use of formulas, unanalyzed expressions and routines patterns, which may enhance their production and fluency and help build self-confidence, they were also found to use the strategies of recombining and constructing new sentences more frequently. This is what is called creating hypotheses - which is seen as a key element in language development in several language learning theories (Ellis, 1989). Poor learners reported using word-for-word translation much more often than the good learners. Similarly, poor learners tended to think first in Turkish then convert to English, more often than the good learners. A similar pattern was found for taking notes in class or lectures in mother tongue rather than target language, which might be linked to the risk capacity of students.

Table 7
Compensation Strategies

	Good	Poor	
	Mean Rank		2-tailed
Using mime or Gestures	63.69	84.83	Z=-3.101, P<.000
Coining Words	60.55	82.53	Z=-3.256, P<.000
Using a Circumlocution or Synonym	53.68	87.33	Z=-5.046, P<.000
Adjusting or Approximating the Message	52.45	88.19	Z=-5.279, P<.000
Using Linguistic Clues	61.19	81.10	Z=-2.895, P<.004
Using Other Clues	61.63	81.78	Z=-3.032, P<.000
Getting Help	62.97	88.60	Z=-3.863, P<.000

Mann-Whitney U-Test

Good learners showed a significantly higher frequency of using compensation strategies. Compensation strategies involve using one's linguistic, non-linguistic and communicative knowledge to maintain continuity in a conversation. This group of strategies enables learners to use the target language not only for comprehension but also for production despite an inadequate repertoire of knowledge, especially of grammar and vocabulary. Therefore, these strategies are likely to stimulate the growth of communicative competence in general as they are oriented towards helping learners overcome knowledge gaps and participate actively in communication and interactions. For instance, guessing strategies were significantly more

frequently employed by the good learners, indicating that good learners, when encountered with gaps in knowledge in all four skills, try to stay in the conversation.

Table 8
Metacognitive Strategies

	Good	Poor	
	Mean Rank		2-tailed
Paying attention (directed)	63.90	80.20	Z=-2.489, P<.013
Paying Attention –selected	61.32	82.00	Z=-3.042, P<.002
Seeking Practice Opportunities	59.22	83.47	Z=-3.589, P<.000
Organizing	55.40	86.13	Z=-4.439, P<.000
Setting Goal and Objectives	50.27	89.71	Z=-5.718, P<.000
Self-monitoring	54.60	86.69	Z=-4.780, P<.000

Mann-Whitney U-Test

Metacognitive strategies are extremely important for successful language learning (Oxford, 1990) as they refer to actions that require learners to coordinate, organize, and arrange their learning, and to set goals, objectives and plan for a language task in an efficient way. Table 8 reveals that good learners used metacognitive strategies significantly more often than the poor learners. Consequently, good learners significantly differed from the poor learners in the strategy of selective, directive paying attention, setting goals and self-monitoring. This simply means that good learners avoid irrelevant distracters when paying attention to the task and deciding to notice particular details, resulting in quick learning. They also realistically monitored their language patterns more than poor learners.

Table 9
Affective and Social Strategies

	Good	Poor	
	Mean Rank		2-tailed
Making Positive Statement	49.72	90.09	Z=-5.841, P<.000
Discussing feelings with someone else	65.32	79.21	Z=-2.030, P<.044
Cooperating with Peers	55.40	86.13	Z=-4.439, P<.000
Cooperating with proficient users of the new language	49.76	88.94	Z=-5.847, P<.000

Mann-Whitney U-Test

As for affective strategies, there appeared two specific strategies: making positive statements and discussing feelings with someone else. Good learners employed these significantly more than the poor learners. Affective strategies are learning strategies concerned with managing emotions when faced with emotional difficulties. When used prior to or during a language task, positive statements serve to provide self-encouragement. Good language learners appeared to be aware of potential frustrations and difficulties. It is evident from Table 9 that good learners discuss this process significantly more often than the poor learners. By discussing feelings with other people in and outside the language classroom good learners might have benefited from these strategies in diminishing inhibitions and anxieties.

When it comes to the social strategies, good learners again were found to be using two important social strategies significantly more frequently than the poor learners. Language is a social act requiring the learners to interact with other language users. To this end good

learners made a concerted effort to work with other learners of the same level and also with more proficient users.

Table 10
Correlation between Belief about Vocabulary and Strategy use

	Placing in a context	Using sounds	Using Imagery	Grouping	Analyzing expression
Importance of vocabulary	.368	.321	.447	.368	.322
	(N) 59	(N) 59	(N) 60	(N)60	(N) 60
	(SIG).004	(SIG).013	(SIG).000	(SIG).004	(SIG) .013

Spearman Correlation Coefficients (p< .005)

The Spearman Correlation Coefficient was used to analyze the relationship between strategy use and students' beliefs about language learning in a further attempt to search for possible motives behind the greater use of strategy by good learners. The analysis matrix in Table 10 indicates that there is a significant correlation between the belief about the role of vocabulary held by good learners, and their strategy use. A strong belief about vocabulary in language learning was observed to correlate with the use of five major vocabulary-related strategies. The good learners who gave much more importance to the role of vocabulary were also observed to use greater vocabulary-based strategies including placing new words in a context, using sounds and imagery, grouping and analyzing expressions. Therefore, it is not surprising to see them put greater effort to use new English words in various contexts, and connect the sound of new English words and images and then place them in related groups.

Table 11
Correlation about special abilities

	Possessing a good ear	Possessing a good memory	Possessing a special ability
Belief about special ability	.342	.280	.483
	(N) 60	(N) 60	(N) 60
	.008	.030	.008
Belief about good memory	.463	.447	.373
	(N) 60	(N) 60	(N) 60
	.000	.000	.004
Belief about good ear	.521	.310	.352
	(N) 60	(N) 60	(N) 60
	.000	.016	.000

Spearman Correlation Coefficients (p< 0.05)

Another interesting result is that there was a positive correlation between beliefs about the existence of special abilities including a good ear and memory and possessing these traits. Good learners who overwhelmingly believed in the existence of these traits were also observed to believe that they possessed these traits. Our quantitative data do not allow us to see to what extent these specific beliefs acted on their specific strategy use. However, it is highly likely that they encouraged the good learners towards greater strategy use. Interestingly enough, the scores of the poor learners for the same items were negatively correlated (-.443, (N) 80, .000, p< .000 Pearson Correlation).

Table 12
Correlation between Belief about Practicing and Strategy use

	Repeating	Practicing Naturalistically	Practicing with sound
Belief about			
Repeating and practicing	.479	.315	409
	(N) 60	(N) 58	(N) 60
	.016	.016	.001

Spearman Correlation Coefficients ($p < 0.05$)

The correlations between scores from the BALLI and SILL questionnaires as highlighted in Table 12 indicate a systematic relationship between the perception of repeating and practicing in language learning and language strategy use. In the above study, students who reported the importance of repeating and practicing were observed to have employed certain vocabulary–related strategies.

Table 13
Correlation between Belief about Speaking and Strategy use

	Seeking practice Opportunities	Paying directed attention	Cooperating with peers
The importance	.366	.369	.346
of speaking	(N) 60	(N) 60	(N) 60
	.001	.000	.008
Practicing with	.446	.428	.489
other students	(N) 60	(N) 60	(N) 60
	.000	.001	.000

Spearman Correlation Coefficient ($p < 0.05$)

As indicated in the responses to the questionnaires by good and poor learners, one of the most striking differences was observed in the ideas concerning the importance of speaking and using the target language for communication purposes. The analysis of the relationship between their approach to their speaking skills and their language behaviors revealed strong correlations for good learners as displayed in Table 13. It appears that good learners who stressed the importance of speaking skills were found to seek as many ways as they could to use their English. Similarly, beliefs about guessing and task persistence were found to strongly correlate with several metacognitive and social strategies. Responses given to the idea that you shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly were positively correlated with the idea that it is important to speak English with excellent pronunciation (.388, (N) 86, .000 $p < 0.01$ for poor learners). The idea held by poor learners that it is best to learn English in an English-speaking country was positively correlated with the idea that it is important to speak English with excellent pronunciation (.411, (N) 86, .000 $p < 0.01$).

Conclusion

This follow-up study confirms the previous research findings (Ehrman & Oxford 1995; Green & Oxford, 1995; Kayaoğlu, 1997), and provides further evidence for the fundamental argument raised by previous research that learners proficient in a foreign language use a greater range of strategies compared to poor learners. Related to the relationship between strategy use and language proficiency, for instance, Ehrman and Oxford (1995) indicated that high achieving students utilize the metacognitive strategies more frequently. In a similar study by Green and Oxford (1995), the successful language learners used more high level

strategies than less successful learners. The same tendency was also observed in this study in all major strategy types from memory, compensation, cognitive, metacognitive, and social to affective strategies. It also seems to be fair to say that to a greater or lesser extent the usage of strategies by learners was associated with success. From this perspective, this study also lends support to language learning strategy theories postulating that other things being equal, at least part of this differential success rate can be attributed to the use of strategies which learners bring to the task of language learning. Griffiths (2003) accounts for this discrepancy in strategy use, in favor of good learners, with the fact that high achieving students are more frequently exposed to the use of language learning strategies.

This does not necessarily lead us to suggest "good" or "bad" strategies since different strategies can be employed in different tasks. Furthermore, the study has its limitations as it is idiosyncratic and limited to the quantitative tradition. Therefore, the findings should be treated with some caution in this respect. It is remarkable to notice that the analysis of the responses given by the good and poor learners to the items regarding the existence of special of abilities, good memory, good ear, the importance of pronunciation, the value of practicing as highlighted in the BALLI questionnaire in this study lends strong support to the previous study undertaken by Kayaoğlu (1997), who used a very similar research design, including the two questionnaires.

All in all, the findings indicate that epistemological beliefs as a central construct, are part of the underlying mechanism of language behavior, and exercise a pervasive influence on learners' strategy use. Since strategic behaviors involve intentionality, investigating language learning strategies in relation to beliefs provide some insight into why a particular set of strategies is used by certain students. This in turn has the potential to yield certain pedagogic implications with which we can design a sounder model of using strategies to benefit teachers. For instance, good learners who were very much concerned with the communicative function of second language learning significantly tended to use compensation and communicative-focused strategies, reflecting what learners reported they do to learn a foreign language. Similarly, learners' beliefs about organizing their learning process, which was very much to do with the degree of metacognitive awareness, resulted in an interesting relationship between language beliefs and the type of metacognive strategy preferred. It is not, then, surprising to see that good learners opted for significantly greater metacognitive strategy use since their metacognitive awareness was significantly greater.

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